

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Tumor Doubling Time and Survival

Dear Sir,

We appreciate Dr. Spratt's insightful comments regarding our paper [1]. Equating 5-year survival rate with 5-year cure rate [2] ignores the literature on delayed (greater than 5 years) recurrence of a primary tumor. However, we believe that most clinicians use 5-year survival rates as they were intended to be used: to estimate how many patients will be alive at the end of 5 years using a similar therapy. In fact, most oncologists are reticent to use the word "cure" with any of their patients. We continue to be astonished by the appearance of recurrence as long as 15–20 years after treatment of the primary tumor.

Clinicians are continually looking for ways to determine which of their patients should be offered a major surgical resection, multidrug chemotherapy, and/or radiotherapy. By asking which patients will benefit or not benefit, we can avoid the postoperative morbidity, chemotherapy toxicity, and/or radiation side effects when

therapy is highly unlikely to be helpful. We believe that melanoma patients with pulmonary metastases and a tumor doubling time ≥ 60 days derive a survival benefit from aggressive pulmonary¹ metastasectomy.

REFERENCES

1. Ollila DW, Stern SL, Morton DL: Tumor doubling time: A selection factor for pulmonary resection of metastatic melanoma. *J Surg Oncol* 1998;69:206–211.
2. Friberg S: 5-year cure rate: Yet another myth. *J Surg Oncol* 1997; 65:73–75.

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